CHAPTER X

THE ECONOMIC SPHERE

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ABOUT the year 847, the Postmaster of the Caliphate of Bagdad, ibn Khordadhbeh, compiled a way-book for the guidance of travellers and couriers. A section of this fa devoted to "the routes of the Jewish Merchants called Radanites "-[1] Well-known though it is, it deserves to be quoted here once again; for no source conveys more strikingly the part which was played by Jews in commerce at that period, when other international intercourse was barely known:—

"These merchants speak Arabic, Persian, Roman [i.e. Greek], the language of the Franks, Andalusians and Slavs. They journey from west to east, from east to west, partly on land, partly by sea. They transport from the west eunuchs, female and male slaves, silk, castor, marten and other furs, and swords. They take ship in the land of the Franks, on the Western Sea, and steer for Farama (Pelusium). There they load their goods on the backs of camels and go by land to Kolzum (Suez) in five days' journey, over a distance of twenty-five parasangs. They embark in the East Sea (Red Sea), and sail from Kolzum to el-Jar (port of Medina) and Jeddah (port of Mecca); then they go to Sind, India, and China. On their return they carry back musk, aloes,

[x]It is conjectured that this term derives from Rhodanus (the Rhone), the estuary of which river was the base of these merchants; or else from the town of Ehaga in Persia.